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The WORK OF A DECADE IN THE SCHOOLS OF MAINE

STATE OF MAINE
EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT

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The Work of a Decade in the Schools of Maine

The energies of the Department, during the past ten years, have been devoted principally to four distinct lines of work. Early in the present administration the effort was made to place before the people of the State in oral, written and pictorial forms the condition of the schools as they existed in 1895-6. The comments and exhibits given in the reports of 1895 included statements of studies pursued, methods used, mistakes made, results achieved and also criticisms and suggestions on all these items. This report also contained reproductions of photographs of school grounds, school buildings, outhouses and schoolrooms.

The work of the teachers and pupils and their attitude toward it were presented as they appeared to the State Superintendent when making his inspection of the schools. While no effort was made to conceal defects and deficiencies, yet all commendable features were given prominent mention and were outlined in detail,—the purpose being to present a true picture of the school in its surroundings and activities and to give estimates of the work done in the schools inspected.

The following year the local superintendents were asked to give their opinions upon the items which had been commended or condemned by the State Superintendent. These questions asked for their judgment on the physical surroundings, the teaching force, the pupil body and the attitude of the churches, politicians and other citizens toward the school. Answers were given under pledge of being held confidential by the Department. In no case did the average estimates, furnished by the superintendents, fall below or exceed those made by the State Superintendent by five per cent. In a majority of instances they varied less than one per cent.

These returns were tabulated, commented upon and, after being printed in pamphlet form, distributed broadcast throughout the State.

When this work was completed the Department undertook the preparation of documents containing aids for teachers, suggestions for school officials and general information for all citizens.

Among the documents issued, having these purposes in view, are the courses of study for elementary and secondary schools

These pamphlets not only contain detailed statements as to the subjects to be studied and the branches that should be taught in each grade but they also include

full outlines of the devices and methods to be used in teaching each study.

In addition to the outline courses and the details of methods there were given lists of books for teachers in each subject and also lists for pupils.

The elementary course also included material for work in nature study, music and drawing,—the purpose being to make the pamphlet containing this course a text-book on the subject matter studied.

In 1897, a pamphlet, entitled "Sketches, Designs and Plans for School Buildings, School Grounds and Outhouses," was issued by the Department. This document contained not only descriptions of school sites, water supply and all the details connected with school grounds and buildings, but also included a large number of elevations and floor plans for school buildings of one, two, three, four, six and eight room structures.

Later, a pamphlet was issued going more into the details of improving school grounds and buildings. The enlarging of grounds, the locating of drives, paths and walks, the planting of forest areas, fruit and vegetable gardens, the preparing of lawns and location of playgrounds, the remodeling of exteriors, the decorating of interiors and the planting of flowers and shrubs and the cultivation of vegetables and fruits were fully discussed and many suggestions given.

Pamphlets were also issued giving courses in the civil government of Maine and the United States and the history and geography of towns, counties, the State and Nation.

A manual, in which the subjects discussed in teachers' associations were outlined in skeleton form, was issued for the use of teachers and officials of county conventions. This document is also of service to those desiring to prepare for examinations for State certificates.

The pamphlet on "Words, reading and literature," was prepared for teachers, but it has also been used in the secondary schools by pupils.

Among the documents containing information for the public might be mentioned the following: "What the school should do for the child," "Some gains," "Waste in the administration of the schools," "An experiment in child study," "The law for the better education of youth," "A study of some school problems," "Union of towns for the purpose of providing expert superintendence," "The school as it was, is and should be," "A study of the schools of northeastern Maine," "Study of the school system of Maine with regard to purpose, scope of instruction, organization, present condition and needs," "History of the school system of Maine."

Among the specific agencies that have been devised or improved for promoting the efficiency of the schools may be named the School Improvement League, the county teachers' associations, town teachers' meetings, teachers' summer schools and educational mass meetings.

The School Leagues have improved hundreds of school yards and buildings and purchased thousands of volumes of books and an equal number of pictures. In not a few schools musical instruments have been provided and statuary now finds a place in many of our schoolrooms. Its best work, however, has not been found in enlarging and beautifying school grounds, adorning schoolrooms, supplying needed material and apparatus, but in persuading parents and citizens generally to learn what the school is, decide what it should be and assist in bringing it to its best estate. The value of the work of the League cannot be stated in words or estimated in terms. The results are to endure and in its triumphs our schools are being signally blessed.

The State examination of teachers has given a new dignity and added remuneration to those engaged in teaching. It has eliminated many of the incompetents and persuaded not a few school officials to consider more carefully the fitness of candidates before placing children under their

instruction. These examinations have wrought an improvement in our teaching force which no other agency could have produced. It is gratifying to know that there are more teachers in this State who hold State certificates than in any other state in the Union.

The State Teachers' Association seems to have entered upon a new lease of life and there are indications that it is to be a power for good in the future. There is promise that all of the educational forces of the State will soon unite in this organization and, working together, accomplish greater results than have as yet been achieved. If the schools of Maine are to become all they should be, the college, the secondary school, the common school, school officials, parents and children must unite their efforts for their improvement.

The county associations have increased their attendance to such an extent that it is almost impossible to find an assembly room in which to hold the meetings. The programs are largely made up of talks or papers by local speakers and the exercises are of a quality that reflect great credit upon those who are responsible for these meetings. No words of praise can be too strong in which to commend the efforts made to render these associations profitable to the teachers.

The town teachers' meetings are of

recent origin. The parents, school officials, teachers and children of several contiguous towns join in presenting exercises of unusual merit. It is believed the number of these meetings will be multiplied in the future.

The summer schools for teachers have been successful from the start. The average attendance has been about one thousand each year. In these schools the teachers have had an opportunity to listen to experts from other states on methods of instruction, school management and special discussions of particular subjects. In stimulating some of the teachers whose scholastic attainments were inadequate to attend academies, high or normal schools and in persuading others to take, or complete, college courses; in interesting teachers in professional and general reading and in developing a love for their work, these schools have rendered a great service and should be continued.

The latest movement has taken the form of a series of "Educational Mass Meetings." Thirty of these were held in as many different towns during the fall of 1904. The aggregate attendance was 13,800. The speakers were Gov. C. B. Aycock of North Carolina, Judge F. D. Winston, North Carolina, Dr. A. E. Winship of the New England Journal of Education of Boston, Dr. Henry Houck,

Deputy State Superintendent of Schools of Pennsylvania and Prof. P. P. Claxton of the University of Tennessee and Superintendent of the Summer School of the South.

No educational movement in this country has attracted more attention, or elicited more favorable comment. The results are most gratifying and it is believed they will be enduring.

The speakers were not only entertaining and instructive, but were stimulating in the sense which makes it possible for their words to abide and bear fruit in a new interest in the school and an increased determination to make it civilization's most potent agency. It is impossible to reproduce the words of commendation and gratitude that were expressed for the pleasure given and the help rendered. This event will mark a new date in our educational history. It is hoped that from this time forward our people will make a study of the school in all its phases and will do the things necessary to make it a means of grace to their children and hence a power for good in the community in which it is located.

This review would be incomplete if mention were not made of the service which has been rendered by parents, pupils, school officials and teachers in improving the schools. The changes they have wrought constitute a revolution although

the process has been evolutionary and the results are seen in improved grounds and buildings and attractive schoolrooms.

Every student of the schools is impressed by the changed attitude of our people as to what our schools shall be. Those who were hostile have either become supporters of the schools or are willing to learn the facts before criticizing them. Those who were indifferent have become interested and are giving to the work their cordial support. Those who were friendly have become enthusiastic. A large number of our people are reading, thinking, studying and investigating the school problem. A large majority of them are doing something each term to make them more efficient.

These efforts should receive a large share of the credit for the better service our schools are giving the State.

This review is given for the purpose of showing that there has been a plan and a purpose in what has been done. After careful consideration it was thought that before important changes could be wrought our people must know the conditions that surrounded and were found within our schools. Then it was felt that helps must be furnished which would assist in making bad things good and good things better. These suggestions were given in the form of documents and through the help of

organizations. The last of these agencies was the series of "rallies" which aroused and impressed our State as it was never stirred before.

It is natural to inquire, "What next?" The answer to this question is found in the booklet entitled "Standard Schools." It is hoped our people will examine the plan outlined in this document and that, after reading and studying the details, they will see fit to embody these suggestions in at least one of these schools in each county.

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